

Call 911 When Stroke Symptoms Strike

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Stroke doesn't discriminate. Often called a brain attack - it can happen to anyone at any time. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on average, one American dies from stroke [every 4 minutes](#). This makes stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States, and a major cause of long-term disability.

When someone is suffering from a stroke, blood flow to the brain is blocked, causing brain cells to die.

“We, as adults, have about 100 billion brain cells, and when we have a stroke called an ischemic stroke, or a clot-caused stroke, 1.9 million of those brain cells die every minute,” explains Angie Steiner, the stroke coordinator at OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center. “So time is of the essence, time is brain, and it’s super important to call 911 and get to the emergency room right away.”

The best chance for a patient to survive a stroke and have a full recovery is for him or her to get to the hospital quickly. However, according to the American Heart Association (AHA), [one in three stroke patients](#) doesn’t call an ambulance when stroke symptoms start. Instead, they may wait to see if symptoms go away or might try to drive themselves or have another person drive them to the emergency room.

According to Steiner, calling 911 gets a patient the quick care they need enroute, and alerts the hospital the patient is on the way.

“Things are already getting done and getting set in place before you arrive to the hospital,” says Steiner. “Once you arrive to the hospital, because they did call that notification in ahead of time, the doctor is right there waiting for you at the door. They assess you and you are taken back to have imaging done of your brain.”

Steiner says many stroke patients who come to the emergency room via private car thought they could get to the hospital faster if they drove themselves or had a loved one drive them during the stroke. However, many end up regretting their decision.

“It definitely depends on the person, but for some it can cause life-long disability if you don’t get treated for the symptoms of a stroke right away,” said Steiner.

Another major issue Steiner sees is people often not recognizing the signs of stroke when they present. It has been found that one in three Americans doesn’t know the signs of a stroke. This means many cannot recognize when they, or someone else, is having a stroke. Steiner says everyone should learn the warning signs and how to BE FAST for stroke.

An acronym has been created to make spotting a stroke easier: BE FAST. Call 911 if you or someone else has any of these symptoms:

- Balance – a sudden loss of balance or coordination
- Eyesight – sudden blurred or double vision or sudden, persistent vision trouble
- Face – one of side of the face droops down or the smile is crooked
- Arm – unable to lift an arm or keep an arm up without drifting down

- Speech –slurred speech, unable to correctly repeat a simple phrase, or unable to understand speech
- Time– it's time to call 911.